



**State of Connecticut**  
**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

STATE CAPITOL  
HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT 06106-1591

**REPRESENTATIVE MIKE D'AGOSTINO**  
91<sup>ST</sup> ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

LEGISLATIVE OFFICE BUILDING  
ROOM 3504  
HARTFORD, CT 06106-1591  
CAPITOL: (860) 240-8585  
E-MAIL: Michael.DAgostino@cga.ct.gov

**CHAIR**  
GENERAL LAW COMMITTEE

**MEMBER**  
EXECUTIVE AND LEGISLATIVE NOMINATIONS COMMITTEE  
PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

**Testimony of State Representative Michael D'Agostino in support of**  
**H.B. 5116 AN ACT REQUIRING THE CREATION OF UTILITY COMPANY TREE PLANTING FUNDS**  
**Energy and Technology Committee Public Hearing**  
**February 24, 2022**

Co-Chair Needleman, Co-Chair Arconti, Vice Chair Winfield, Vice Chair Allie-Brennan, Ranking Member Formica, Ranking Member Ferraro and Members of the Energy and Technology, for the record my name is Michael D'Agostino, State Representative for the 91st District in Hamden and I am offering this testimony in support of HB 5116 An Act Requiring the Creation of Utility Company Tree Planting Funds.

Thank you to the committee for raising this important piece of legislation and the opportunity to offer testimony here today. In years past, I have appeared before this committee to testify on legislation concerning tree trimming and vegetation management practices performed by utility companies, specifically in regards to notification requirements and standards for tree trimming. In addition, just recently as last week I submitted testimony locally at a Hamden Community Input Session in support of dedicating a small set amount of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds for tree planting and improving our towns natural canopy and landscape. Today I will make a lot of those same points.

First, I am glad that the Energy and Technology is the committee that has decided to raise this legislation, because I think a part of protecting the reliability of state's power grid goes is directly related to establishing and maintaining a healthy natural landscape of trees and vegetation along our highways, roadways and electrical infrastructure. Pruning, maintenance, branch and tree cutbacks and removal of dead trees are always needed. However, many times I think too much focus and funds are spent unnecessarily on clear cutting healthy branches and trees, instead of more funding and resources dedicated towards replacing and replenishing vegetation that will provide a healthier landscape and less damage to our electrical infrastructure during storms. With storms over the past several years, and the vegetation "management" practices of utility companies that I continue to oppose, we have lost much of our natural tree canopy. This legislation would be a great way to start working on restoring it.

One suggested change I would recommend however would be that although public lands should be a priority, we should also consider investments for placing trees in areas and neighborhoods that desperately need their many benefits. A lot of vegetation has been removed in urban areas and locations with heavy development. As a consequence, urban areas often are in greatest need of replanting. So replanting projects will be most beneficial if they have the flexibility to plant where trees are most needed, which surround environmental justice issues as well as climate change. Providing the natural landscape of trees, especially in areas of the town that have more paving and concrete, provide many ecological benefits.

These include their ability to absorb carbon, stormwater, mitigate flooding and reduce heat effects especially in the summer. Indeed, the fact that air quality and heat stresses disproportionately impact our underserved neighborhoods cannot be stated enough when it comes environmental justice. Trees also simply make our state look more welcoming and attractive for residents and local businesses.

Also, in drafting changes to this legislation I think we need to not overly rely on the utilities for expertise when it comes to planning and planting. There is such a wealth of information for professional foresters and tree wardens who specialize in forestry. They utilize standards and studies which show we should live in areas with at least 30% tree canopy cover and within a 300 meter (5 to 10 minute walk) from a wooded area. Also, knowledge about making sure we are planting the right trees - as native trees provide a greater ecological benefit is important.

Thank you again for all of the committee's work and attention on this. Again, I think it is a very good start and look forward to working with the committee to securing the bill's passage.